

Research Paper

Analyzing Social Actors' Conflict in Natural Resources Management and Its Impact on Rural Communities (Case Study: Borujen County)

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ABSTRACT

Natural resources are considered to be essential elements of human life for fulfilling necessary needs, such as food, clothing and housing. However, the effort to addressing basic needs, to some extent, causes to creates conflict among stakeholders of natural resources stakeholders, which leads to adverse effects on their livelihoods. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the conflict pattern among relevant actors, and to analyze the impact of this conflict on the rural communities. A multiple case study methodology with multiple units of analysis was utilized conducted in the Dorahan and Cheshme Ali Watersheds, located in the Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, Iran. The data were collected using qualitative techniques such as observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, mapping and Venn diagrams. The data were finally analyzed using the Conflict Pattern Assessment (CPA) technique. The results showed that the external actors and local communities, including rural and nomadic people had different interests in the watersheds, which caused conflicts among them. The most important consequences of these conflicts have been weakening of rural households' livelihoods, increasing rural – urban emigration and decreasing social capital. Despite the negative impacts, the conflict has had some short- term positive impacts on improving rangelands vegetation due to prohibiting rural livestock from early grazing.

Key words:

Social actors' conflict, Natural resources management, Households' livelihood, Rural communities

Extended Abstract**1. Introduction**

Natural resources are used in agricultural activities to provide food. They are also considered as the natural capitals of rural households and communities' livelihoods, particularly poor-resources farmers. The challenge of food security is an old issue, and still one of the main concerns of the world. An example

in case is the food crisis and famine in the Horn of Africa, especially Somalia, which happened in 2011.

Resource management always involves cooperation but also different and often competing interests. Natural resources are essential elements of human life for fulfilling necessary needs, such as food, clothing and housing. However, the effort to address basic needs, to some extent, causes conflict among stakeholders of natural resources, which result in adverse effects on their livelihoods.

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Any complex management of natural resources should address the ownership of natural resources, their control, and sharing benefits. Natural resource conflicts refer to disputes over access to, control and use of natural resources. For example, people usually have different interests in resources such as forests, water, pastures and land, therefore, want to manage them differently. Disagreements also arise when the interests and needs are incompatible or the priorities of some groups are not attended in policies, programs and projects. Such conflicts are an inevitable feature of all societies partly due to the multiple and competing demands on resources. Social conflicts can develop if user groups are excluded from participating in natural resource management.

Other reasons for conflicts are contradictions between local and higher management systems; misunderstandings of policy and program objectives; contradictions or ambiguity in laws and policies; unfair resource distribution; or poor policy and program implementation. In recent years, the scope and magnitude of natural resource conflicts have increased and worsened. These conflicts, if not addressed, can escalate into violence, environmental degradation, failure of projects and suppression of livelihoods.

2. Methodology

This paper aimed to illustrate the conflict pattern among relevant actors, and to analyze the impact of this conflict on the rural communities. A multiple case study methodology with multiple units of analysis was conducted in Dorahan and Cheshme Ali watersheds, located in the Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, Iran. The data were collected using qualitative techniques such as observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, mapping and Venn diagrams. The data were finally analyzed using the Conflict Pattern Assessment (CPA) technique. In this model, it is possible to draw a "picture" of the situation in the actor arena through the specification of different actors, their orientations and resources and contributions in conflict types.

For this purpose, every actor is assigned a position in a two dimensional grid that reflects its institutional level and policy field (issue dimension). Distinguishing further between primary, secondary, external and hybrid actors, every actor is classified with regard to the three main dimensions described in "actor type". Then, the interactions between those actors are added, distinguishing between conflict types and the consequences of these conflicts.

3. Results

The external actors and local communities, including rural and nomadic people had different interests over the watersheds, which cause conflicts among them. For example, while the conservationist experts working in the Natural Resources and Watershed Management Administration (NRWMA) were interested in conserving national resources, rural communities were looking for producing more crops and livestock in rangelands and collecting edible and medicinal species for addressing their households' livelihood needs. Moreover, rural communities showed a conflict with the Agricultural Jihad Organization at provincial and district level, due to the top-down perspective of their experts and water supply challenges. However, they shared some common interests in terms of agricultural production and food security.

These communities had also conflicts with the sub-county level Agricultural Jihad Organization (Agricultural Services Center) because of poor supply of agricultural services, as well as with the provincial Water Company regarding poor drinking water supply to their community and inter-basin water transfer from the watersheds to other provinces. In addition, they showed conflicts with community-based organizations such as rural cooperatives because of their inefficiency to provide required inputs and goods, as well as with the rural dispute resolution councils for their unjust decisions.

These conflicts among the actors were assessed in terms of the controversy level. The highest level of conflict was identified between the local communities and NRWMA, while the conflict with other external actors are a kind of dissatisfaction with the services received from them. The most important consequences of these conflicts were weakening of rural households' livelihoods, increasing rural – urban emigration and decreasing social capital. Despite the negative impacts, the conflict has had some short-term positive impacts on improving rangelands vegetation due to prohibiting rural livestock from early grazing.

4. Discussion

The conflicts between the rural communities and the external actors can challenge sustainable natural resources management. These conflicts can happen because of inappropriate policies to reduce the dependency of local communities on natural resources, to diversify their livelihoods, to involve them actively in natural resources management programs, and to enhance their community-based organizations. Managing these challenges depends

on a comprehensive understanding of the relevant factors influencing these conflicts and providing a platform for participation among relevant actors.

5. Conclusion

Managing the challenges due to the conflicts of interest in natural resources management and rural development depends on a comprehensive understanding of the relevant factors influencing these conflicts and providing a platform for participation among relevant actors. These factors come from both inside communities (individuals or community based organizations) and external institutions outside their communities.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.